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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6612

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 001019

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/01/2018

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SUBJECT: MCNS ON MARCH 30 REVIEWS BASRAH, BAGHDAD, NINEWA
SECURITY OPERATIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 00880

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S REL AUS UK) SUMMARY: With PM Nouri al-Maliki still in Basra, Deputy PM Barham Salih chaired the March 30 Ministerial Committee on National Security (MCNS) foreshadowed by the sound of indirect fire (IDF) impacting in the International Zone as participants arrived at the meeting. The Committee, composed of deputies of most ministries in attendance, discussed the recently released statement of Moqtada al-Sadr and GOI response, security situation and operations in Basra and Baghdad, and economic and political steps to take once the fighting subsides. End Summary.

Sadr's Statement

¶2. (S REL AUS UK) Deputy PM Barham Salih opened the MCNS meeting with comments on the statement released that day from Moqtada al-Sadr that called on his supporters to end all armed appearances in Basra and other provinces. Salih reported that PM Maliki had instructed government spokesman Ali Dabbagh to issue a statement welcoming Sadr's statement and re-stating the GOI's intention to pursue operations only against criminal gangs, and not against any political party or movement. Ambassador noted that Sadr's statement presented an opportunity that should not be lost.

¶3. (S REL AUS UK) National Security Advisor (NSA) Muwaffaq Rubaie reported on his conversation earlier that day with PM Maliki. The PM ascribed Sadr's statement to the success of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the crisis situation that the enemy had found itself in. The PM reportedly considered the forces opposing the government to lack coordination, suffer from low morale, be in crisis, and preparing to face defeat. Rubaie added that the PM would stay in Basra for an additional two to three days. He also noted that the ISF would pursue operations in Basra to regain control of some police stations and the port, presumably the Port of Basra but he did not specify. The D/PM indicated that the statement, and its implementation, had to be studied carefully before ISF stood down. Rubaie noted that ISF operations would continue.

Military update

¶4. (S REL AUS UK) GEN Babakir Zebari, the Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Armed Forces, and GEN Abud, the commander of the Baghdad Operations Center, provided an update on the current situation in Basra, other southern provinces, and Baghdad.
--Babil: 8th Division has control of the center of the province, many IEDs have been placed, ISF is responding vigorously when attacked or confronted, citizens are cooperating with ISF, 65 criminals have been arrested;

--Karbala city and province are quiet and under the control of the ISF, some small incidents, tribes are assisting the ISF throughout the province;
--Al Kut in Wasit province is very tense, but calm, the ISF having liberated the center of the city from armed men;
--Al Amarah in Maysan province is under cautious control, but clashes over the previous nine hours with armed groups have left dead on both sides, including one ISF commander;
--As Sumawah is calm, no clashes;
--An Nasariyah in Dhi Qar province has been tense due to armed groups firing on ISF, air support is needed but tribes remain supportive of ISF.

15. (S REL AUS UK) Babakir noted that because Basra operations are under the PM's direct command, he did not have full details of operations there. However, he could report that the Karbala emergency battalion had returned to Karbala. He praised the support of Coalition Forces (CF), in particular four Apaches and several F-16s, for their crucial assistance.

He noted that there was good coordination with the Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) and that the Iraqi Army (IA) was reinforcing its men on the ground. Logistics support was functioning; supplies to the troops were flowing.

He closed these remarks by noting the death of one battalion commander in combat and that the tribes in Basra were working closely with the ISF.

16. (S REL AUS UK) The commander of the Baghdad Operations Center, GEN Abud, gave an overview of events in Baghdad since March 24. He reported that while the ISF had not foreseen the violence by militias armed groups, the ISF had responded well. He stated that ISF procedures had worked, in part because they had prepared for the worst and had found that containing the armed groups had not been as difficult as

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planned for. He noted that attacks were declining and that ISF were conducting night raids as of March 28. Over the course of 5 days, 190 armed men had been arrested. Also, 192 weapons had been turned in on March 30. Most positive, he said there were no indicators of coordinated attacks by the armed groups.

17. (S REL AUS UK) Abud insisted that the situation in Baghdad was improving, and called for a full, not one-half, resolution of the problem lest it happen again. Most important for the future of his country, Abud noted, was that weapons must be taken from the hands of the people on the streets of Iraq. Responding to the D/PM, Abud said that conducting operations in Baghdad was like fighting in 15 provinces, but progress was being made, he insisted. Sadr City and Shu'la were being surrounded to shut down their malign actions -- the loss of one or two checkpoints was not significant. He reported that about 18 ISF had been killed, many more wounded, and possibly as many as 400 militia fighters had died.

Iraqi Police

18. (S REL AUS UK) The Iraqi Police Service (IPS) Director reported that the police in Baghdad had, in the main, responded well. Few had abandoned their post and there had been good coordination with the Sons of Iraq (SOI) in their neighborhoods. There had been some cases, particularly in the Shu'la district of Baghdad, of police surrendering quickly to militia fighters, but this was rare. In Basra, the picture was less sanguine. IPS admitted that over 400 policemen had been fired for dereliction of duty, and he estimated that ten percent of the National Police in Basra were bad and the police at their posts were scared and intimidated. The Ministry of Interior had sent 15 police commanders to Basra to stiffen discipline there.

AQI Infiltration

¶9. (S REL AUS UK) The Deputy Minister of State for National Security reported that AQI might be sending 30 fighters into Basra to inflame the situation there. He also reported that 85 militants had turned themselves in.

JAM and JAM-SG Split Healed

¶10. (S REL AUS UK) Deputy National Security Advisor Safa'a lamented that this fighting had brought Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) and JAM Special Groups (JAM-SG) together, though not the same in all parts of the country, noting that in Najaf the distinction was most pronounced. Re-establishing this wedge would be important. The government must now consider non-military steps to be taken for long-term success against the militants, he added. Abud insisted that the criminality must be stopped and weapons taken from the militants. Babakir stressed the importance of dealing with terrorist elements first then moving on to tackle the criminal militias regardless of their political or ethnic affiliation.

CG's Views

¶11. (S REL AUS UK) MNF-I Commanding General GEN Petraeus emphasized Babakir's point that they should not lose sight of focus on AQI, Ansar al Sunna, and their Sunni affiliates. He asked the group to recall how AQI had set off ethno-sectarian violence in Baghdad and warned the committee that there was intelligence evidence of Sunni regarding female suicide vest bombers. He also endorsed Safa'a's comments about the latest action having brought together JAM and SGs when all had worked to separate JAM from the SGs over the past year. GEN Petraeus observed that SGs had used JAM as their defensive perimeter.

¶12. (S REL AUS UK) GEN Petraeus urged serious analysis of the performance of all of the security forces. He stated that it was essential to determine where there were weaknesses and which leaders had not performed well. He noted that military commanders of fighting units cannot be selected on political considerations.

¶13. (S REL AUS UK) GEN Petraeus noted Basra was quieter but questioned whether that could be a function of the ISF not pushing as hard as the previous day. He also noted the value of close air support and air weapons teams against IDF cells. He also urged the group to be realistic about the reasons behind the JAM statement and why JAM was pulling back. In

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addition to the JAM announcement, GEN Petraeus also cited Coalition success against rocket sites and shortages of ammunition among JAM groups. He noted that below-the-surface political negotiations were already going on, to include with neighboring Iran.

¶14. (S REL AUS UK) In Baghdad, IDF continued to come from Sadr City and its periphery, but Rashid had remained quiet, a credit to the efforts of the Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation. MNF-I was not conducting ground raids into Sadr City, but was working to shut down and deny rocket and mortar launching points in and around Sadr City. He added that the committee still needed to clean up the Facility Protection Service.

¶15. (S REL AUS UK) GEN Petraeus also noted that attack levels in the North were down 11 percent but that ISF and Coalition were still busy in Mosul.

Looking Beyond the Battles

¶16. (S REL AUS UK) NSA Rubaie observed that political and economic measures must be taken after the military effort.

He agreed with Safa'a and GEN Petraeus that the wedge between JAM and SGs must be re-established. Rubaie cited the progress made in Najaf and Karbala and observed that neither city had seen the outbreaks of violence as other cities in the southern provinces had. He also noted that the Sadr movement was not as cohesive as it had been since Sadr announced his "retirement" from politics to pursue theological studies. Most important, we could not lose sight of the long-term vision for a military subordinate to civilian control.

¶17. (S REL AUS UK) Ambassador noted that Iraq has surplus funds in its budget that could be used to create jobs in the short-term and develop the economy in the mid-term. The PM should talk about this. The D/PM agreed, suggesting a growth fund was needed but job creation now to draw potential supporters away from the militants. He called on the United States and the UK to support Iraqi efforts in this regard with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Minister of Finance Bayan Jabr opined that capital projects were better than giving money away, and that the IMF Stand-by Agreement (SBA) required funds be used for development projects -- it would take three months to get things going. D/PM Salih said that was too long, funds for projects to create jobs were needed now. He and Jabr must discuss with the PM, he concluded. Spokesman Ali Dabbagh interjected that GOI efforts for economic recovery and development must be announced to show the people their government was working on their behalf.

Humanitarian Situation

¶18. (S REL AUS UK) The D/PM expressed concerns about the suffering of the people in both Basra and Baghdad. For the former, the United Nations Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and his office were coordinating the airlift of needed supplies. For Baghdad, he advocated the lifting of the curfew during the day if the security situation would allow it. (Note: The GOI lifted the curfew in Baghdad March 31, at 0500 local. End note.) UK Ambassador Prentice and Ambassador expressed their support for UNAMI's efforts; Ambassador noted that the UNAMI deputy Special Representative David Shearer would travel to Basra to help coordinate assistance. Ambassador emphasized that the GOI should lead and the international community would assist in providing humanitarian assistance. GEN Petraeus noted that Dr. Chalabi offered to go to Sadr City and meet with the Sadr City Council as the preliminary step in providing humanitarian assistance and essential services. GEN Petraeus stated that it would be a very good idea if someone from the Prime Minister's office accompanied Chalabi, adding that Dr. Safa'a constituted a fine choice.

Post Mortem Needed

¶19. (S REL AUS UK) The Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) deputy director reminded the committee of the need to do an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy, how well it did in battle, and what can be done to improve security. D/PM Salih agreed that there must be an examination of lessons learned, but later.

Next Steps

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¶20. (S REL AUS UK) After NSA Rubaie listed three goals for Baghdad security (rid Baghdad of AQI, rid Baghdad of SGs, remove all heavy weapons from Baghdad), D/PM Salih wrapped up the meeting with calls for closer coordination with MNF-I. He added that when the Prime Minister returned, the government needed to have a mechanism for assessing how it did in meeting its own goals. He also reminded ISF commanders present that lawlessness by the ISF, such as an

alleged raid for supplies on the Ministry of Health, was unacceptable.

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